
Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྣོད་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བལྟགས་སོ་

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Based on the motivation we have just generated, we can now engage in our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

To generate the motivation for receiving the teaching think, “For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well”.

1.2.2.1 THE FAULTS OF LACKING INTROSPECTION

1.2.2.1.2. One does not generate pure wisdom

If we lack mindfulness and introspection our ability to generate pure or perfect wisdom will be hindered. The following presentation will be relatively easy to comprehend as the meaning is not too difficult to grasp, but what we need to keep in mind is that it is advice we need to *apply* to ourselves, in relation to our own practice. All of us have already spent significant time listening to the Dharma, thinking about it and even trying to meditate. What is being presented here is that even though one has spent significant time engaging in this, if one does not continuously apply mindfulness and introspection then it is still possible for one's practice to degenerate. This is a really key point to keep in mind. As I emphasise regularly, we see cases where certain individuals may have spent quite a bit of time and energy studying and so forth, but then after some time they give up the Dharma. What causes them to give up their Dharma practice is not having applied mindfulness and introspection in their regular life.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

25. *Even the listening, contemplation and meditation
Of someone having a mind devoid of introspection,
Like water in a leaking vase,
Will not be kept in mind by memory.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the verse:

If one is separated from introspection, then one will not generate perfect wisdom. A person may even have the wisdoms of listening, contemplating and meditating from before, but if they lack introspection then, like water that does not remain in a broken vase, they do not abide in mindfulness and thus their wisdom degenerates. This is due to degenerated introspection.

The advice here is really succinct, but for us to incorporate its meaning into our life, we need to take this advice as a personal instruction. When we consider the fact that this advice is given by Shantideva—a bodhisattva himself—from his own insight and profound wisdom, illustrating that the most crucial point on the path to enlightenment is to maintain mindfulness and introspection. That should then encourage one to actually take this advice to heart.

The commentary starts with, *If one is separated from introspection*. Introspection here refers to the mind that is constantly vigilant of the way we conduct ourselves through our mind, through our physical actions, and through our speech. What is being presented here is the result of not applying introspection, which is something we need to recall

again and again, for example, ‘What are the thoughts occurring in my mind?’, ‘How am I conducting my physical actions?’, ‘What kind of speech am I uttering?’ One must check on the basis of distinguishing between what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded, then analyse how one is conducting oneself through one's body, speech and mind. In a meditation session, having applied mindfulness and identified the object and focused on it, after a while that which checks whether we are still keeping our focus on the chosen object is done by introspection. So if our mind has wandered off and we've become distracted, then it is through introspection that we will notice that, and then we need to reapply mindfulness. This approach is being explained here in terms of mindfulness with our body, speech and mind in our daily lives.

Thus, as the commentary explains, if one is separated from introspection then the consequence is that *one will not generate perfect wisdom*. The Tibetan term *te* implies that a reason is to follow, which is presented here with the example of a broken or cracked vase. In the regular offering prayer that we do here before tea and meals there is also the word *te*; however some teachers have said the meaning would be more profound if the word *nyi* (or sole) is used instead, which would reflect that the lama is the sole creator of all.

So, what is being explained is that even if a person has previously gained a certain amount of wisdom through *listening, contemplating and meditating, if they lack introspection*, then that would affect their mindfulness as well. A lack of mindfulness arises because of not applying introspection, they are mutually supportive of each other—to have good mindfulness one needs to have adequate introspection.

The example of a cracked vase presented here is similar to that given in Lam Rim teachings, in which the analogy extends to three types of vases describing the conditions from which one needs to be free in order to listen to the teachings: the upside down vase; the dirty vase and the leaky vase. As the Lam Rim explains, it is really important to be free from these conditions in order to be a good recipient for the teachings, so they can benefit one's mind. I have emphasised this point previously.

Using the first example, if one were like an upside down vase when listening to teachings, then, just as one cannot pour water into the vase, likewise when one listens one cannot pay attention, and no matter how many teachings are presented they will not go into one's mind. With a dirty vase, if clean food and drink are put into it, then it will spoil the food. In relation to listening to teachings, this analogy shows that one needs to be free from a negative motivation as this will spoil the teachings. Even if the teachings themselves are pure, one will completely misinterpret them and get the wrong meaning. Thirdly, a vase may be upright and clean, but if it has a leak then no matter what is put into it, it will all come out. Common sayings support this, e.g. ‘what goes in one ear comes out the other’. So whatever the teaching one has listened to, one needs to be able to retain it. The point is that we need mindfulness to retain whatever instructions or teachings we receive.

We need to understand the proper manner of listening to the teachings. The Lam Rim states one needs to be free from the three adverse conditions (the analogy of the three vases) and apply the six recognitions. These are important points. Just as water does not remain in a broken vase, someone who lacks introspection will not be able to abide in mindfulness. This again shows how mindfulness is supported by

introspection. If one lacks introspection that affects one's mindfulness, and also the wisdom of listening, contemplating and meditating, then whatever wisdom one has gained will degenerate. This is all due to the degeneration of introspection.

1.2.2.1.3. *One does not generate pure morality*

This indicates that someone who lacks introspection will not be able to generate pure morality.

The verse reads:

26. *A person listening, having faith
And striving strongly in many ways,
Because of having the fault of lacking
introspection,
Becomes sullied by the dirt of downfalls.*

Gyaltsab Je explains this verse as follows:

A person with faith who has listened to many teachings and strives strongly in many different ways to practise virtue, but who has the fault of not having introspection that knows what is right and what is wrong, will be sullied by the pollution of the dirt of the downfalls. Therefore one should strive in guarding introspection.

This explanation is very relevant at this time. If a person already has faith, has listened to many teachings and has striven strongly in many ways to practise virtue but has not maintained the introspection of knowing what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded, then their practice is sullied by the pollution of the stains of the downfalls.

We can see so many examples of this within the Tibetan community itself, with geshe and even lamas giving up their vows. Some have practised significantly for many years and later gave up their vows. We can also see many westerners who were once ordained Sangha, monks and nuns, who have now given up their vows. On a personal note, when I was in India many years ago I met a monk who was from Amdo. I recall I was really taken by his good composure, and apparently he had spent 12 years in retreat. He seemed like a very subdued monk, a very unique and genuine sort of monk at that time. However, at a later stage apparently he gave up being a monk and started living a lay life. This is quite astonishing to see.

I have heard many accounts of otherwise quite learned and good monks who have later disrobed. I recall another instance in the year 2000 at a Kalachakra initiation teaching in Bodhgaya. I was sitting up in front with Geshe Sonam and just in front was another youngish monk. As His Holiness passed by to the throne he would stop and pat me on the back and talk to me. The young monk in front recognised me and called me by name. I asked Geshe Sonam who he was and he told me he was quite a learned monk, actually a geshe from Sera Je who teaches the young monks in Namgyal Monastery, His Holiness' personal monastery in Dharamsala. Apparently His Holiness was fond of him because of his good knowledge and ability to teach other monks. This young geshe was fond of me and started to ask me questions on debate topics. The answers I gave him seemed to satisfy him. He said that if I needed any text books or anything from Dharamsala he could send them to me. He would even help me during the tea breaks to go to the private toilets inside, so I didn't have to go outside. So anyway, we had a good rapport. Then about a year later I heard that he had travelled to Canada, is no longer a monk and is now living a regular life as a lay person. This brought

to my awareness how pitiful it is to lose such great teachers to an ordinary life.

At the conclusion of this verse Gyaltsab Je mentions *Therefore one should strive in guarding introspection*. The implication here is that even if one is quite learned and has gained quite a lot of wisdom from listening to the teachings over many years, contemplating the meanings and even meditated to a certain degree, then, if all of this is not supported with continuous mindfulness and introspection there is still the chance for one to be sullied by stains of the downfall. Thus, introspection is presented as being essential to maintain one's practice.

A commitment that many of you are already doing regularly, called the *Six Session Guru Yoga*, is structured as a means to maintain mindfulness and introspection continuously. One meditates and reviews the vows and commitments three times in the morning and three times in the afternoon/evening which helps one maintain one's mindfulness and introspection throughout the day.

The *Six Session Guru Yoga* practice requires not just reciting the words, but recalling the meaning to the best of our ability. Again, we have all spent significant time hearing a lot of teachings, thinking and contemplating so it would be a great pity if we lost whatever wisdom we have gained now, or if it degenerated. So, in order to maintain the understanding we have gained we definitely need to apply mindfulness and introspection. I regularly encourage you by saying 'always protect your mind with mindfulness and introspection'. This includes myself too; I also need to be mindful and careful of my practice. There is a Tibetan expression which says that the teacher shouldn't be like a trumpet. This analogy is used as the opening of the trumpet is faced outward and the sound goes out loudly. So it is for mutual benefit that we need to be reminded of this point.

I acknowledge that you already spend a lot of time studying and paying attention to the teachings, which is great. Now the only thing is to remind you to maintain that by practising with mindfulness and introspection. The main point is to maintain a continuity of practice.

1.2.2.1.4. *Earlier accumulated virtue is destroyed*

This indicates that earlier accumulated virtue can be destroyed with the lack of introspection.

The verse reads:

27. *The thief of a lack of introspection
Follows degenerated mindfulness.
Although having accumulated merits
The thief steals them and one goes to the lower
realms.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning, along with an analogy:

A person without introspection will be robbed by the thief of the afflictions of their earlier accumulated wealth of merits due to degenerated introspection, which forgets the virtuous object.

When earlier accumulated wealth is stolen the person becomes a beggar. Similarly, when earlier accumulated merits are stolen the person becomes destitute of merits and goes to the lower realms.

When a person lacks introspection *the afflictions will rob them like a thief*. What they are being robbed of is their *accumulated merit*. Usually a thief would rob someone of their wealth and the analogy here relates to our accumulated merits. This explains that merits accumulated earlier can be taken away

due to a degenerated introspection which forgets the virtuous object. The connection here is that if one is not mindful of the virtuous object then one will forget it. Furthermore, with a lack of introspection one does not bring one's mind back to the virtuous object. Thus, because one does not bring one's focus back to the virtuous object, one's earlier accumulated merits will degenerate. Referring to the analogy, *when accumulated wealth is stolen a person becomes a beggar*, even when a wealthy person is robbed, because their wealth is gone they will be left with nothing and become a beggar. Using this same analogy, *when earlier accumulated merit is stolen, the person becomes destitute and goes to the lower realms*. The significant point here is that if one forgets the virtuous object, which is all the accumulated virtues that one has accumulated, (and the causes for one to obtain a fortunate rebirth) then, with a lack of introspection, all of those virtues can degenerate, which is the cause for one to go to the lower realms.

So we need to be really careful not to lose the virtues that we have put so much effort into accumulating earlier. In relation to ourselves, we have definitely listened to the teachings, accumulated knowledge and understanding and engaged in practices for accumulating merits. When all that we have acquired does not degenerate then they would be significant causes for a fortunate rebirth. However, if they were to degenerate through forgetting the virtuous object due to lack of mindfulness and introspection, then we actually lose the causes we have already accumulated. That is why we need to take this instruction to heart.

1.2.2.1.5. *It obstructs the achievement of virtue not accumulated earlier*

This means that lacking introspection will prevent one from accumulating further virtue which one may not have accumulated already.

If one maintains introspection then one's earlier accumulated virtue will not be destroyed, and one will not be obstructed from achieving virtue one has not yet accumulated. In contrast to that, if we were to lack introspection, then earlier accumulated virtue is destroyed and we are further obstructed from achieving virtues that we have not yet accumulated. This is how we need to incorporate the need to apply and always maintain introspection, as opposed to lacking it, and the consequences of that.

The verse relating to this heading reads:

28. *This gang of affliction robbers
Looks for an opportunity.
If they get a chance they steal virtue
And kill off the life of a happy rebirth.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning:

This gang of affliction robbers looks for an opportunity to steal the wealth of virtue. If one does not protect oneself with introspection, and they get a chance, they will steal one's virtue and also destroy the result, happy migrations and the life of liberation, in the progress.

Having contemplated the faults of not having introspection one should strive in introspection that checks the situation of the three doors

The commentary is quite clear and the analogy highlights the main point. Just as a gang of robbers look for an opportunity to steal others' wealth, as soon as there is an opportunity, they will not hesitate—they will rob immediately. Likewise the afflictions we have in our mind are like the gang of robbers who are waiting for an

opportunity to steal away our virtues. If one does not protect oneself with introspection and the afflictions get a chance, *they will steal one's virtue and also destroy the results of one's virtue, which is a happy migration and the life of liberation* which we are *in the process* of building. In conclusion, having contemplated the faults of not having introspection, one should strive in the introspection that investigates how we conduct ourselves through our three doors. Periodically we should check how we are conducting ourselves through our three doors of body, speech and mind. As mentioned earlier, the explanation here is quite clear: the main point is for one to actually take the advice to heart and put it into practice.

1.2.2.2. GUARDING MINDFULNESS AS THE METHOD FOR GUARDING INTROSPECTION

Mindfulness and introspection are presented as supportive of each other: in order to guard mindfulness one needs to apply introspection and vice versa. To have introspection we need to also apply mindfulness. This heading is divided into two:

1.2.2.2.1. Showing

1.2.2.2.2. Explaining

1.2.2.2.1. Showing

The verse reads:

29. *Therefore, do not send mindfulness
Away from the door of the mind.
Should it happen, place it closely
By recalling the sufferings of the lower realms.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains the meaning thus:

Because there are many faults if one does not have introspection, do not send the mindfulness of not forgetting the virtuous object away from the door of the house of the mind. In case mindfulness weakens and does leave, remind yourself of the sufferings of the lower realms, and immediately protect the house of the mind again.

Because of the many faults associated with losing introspection, using the analogy of mind as a house, one should not allow mindfulness (particularly forgetting the virtuous object), to leave from the door.

The commentary further explains '*in case mindfulness weakens*' and it does go (because a beginner's mindfulness is hard to maintain all the time), one needs to remind oneself again of the sufferings and the pitiful situation of the lower realms, and that this is the consequence of a lack of mindfulness. Then one will immediately protect the house of the mind again.

1.2.2.2.2. Explaining

Having thus presented how to guard mindfulness, next follows the various conditions for guarding mindfulness as a method of guarding introspection. These are subdivided into three.

1.2.2.2.2.1. Relying on the outer condition of a virtuous friend

1.2.2.2.2.2. How to generate the inner condition of correct mental application

1.2.2.2.2.3. How to generate the inner conditions of mindfulness and introspection

1.2.2.2.2.1. Relying on the outer condition of a virtuous friend

What are the various conditions for guarding mindfulness as a method of guarding introspection? The first is relying on the outer condition of a virtuous friend, or what we call a teacher or guru. The teacher is a virtuous friend, thus relying

on the lama is relying on a virtuous friend. This then becomes an external condition for one to be able to maintain one's introspection.

The verse reads:

30. *From following the lama,
Through to advice by the abbot,
Out of fear, the fortunate ones are respectful,
And generate mindfulness easily.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The fortunate ones respect the trainings and will follow the advice of their abbot, preceptor, friends in pure training and the like out of a feeling of shame and consideration and fear of being degraded by others. These are methods for protecting mindfulness.

Since they generate easily the mindfulness that does not forget the virtuous object, regardless of whether they listen, contemplate or meditate, they base their practice on mastering mindfulness.

The method for protecting mindfulness presented here is that those who are *the fortunate ones* will respect the trainings and follow the advice of the abbot and the like out of a feeling of shame and consideration. For those in the ordained community the abbot is the one from whom vows are received. A preceptor gives precepts to the lay community who take lay precepts. Friends in pure training would be in the larger sangha community—those who help one accumulate virtue - friends in pure training. As one has taken vows and precepts from a prominent being and made promises to such a prominent being, it would be improper to breach them. It is said that the significance of receiving the vows and commitments from highly accomplished masters is that the mere recollection of them will help one to be more mindful of not breaching the vows. The hesitation to break those vows will be stronger because of the great respect one has for the lama (qualified virtuous friends—teacher, abbot etc.) *With the fear of being degraded by others*, means that when one has fear of being looked down upon, or where others may say something to put one in a bad light, then through consideration of this one will be able to apply mindfulness. These are the methods for protecting mindfulness since they generate easily the mindfulness that does not forget the virtuous object. The key point here is that since the mindfulness of not forgetting the virtuous object can easily lapse, regardless of whether one has listened, contemplated or meditated, you must base your practice on mastering mindfulness in order to protect your earlier merit and vows etc.

Shame and consideration are two very important virtues we need to maintain. The difference between shame and embarrassment is that the focus of shame is one's commitment to others, such as one's lamas and Buddha etc. If one avoids engaging in faults that would cause disgrace to those others, this is shame. Embarrassment arises because an action is not good for one's own reason i.e. it is not good for me to break these vows. This uses oneself as a reason to avoid faults in consideration of others.

In summary, take *relying on outer conditions* as a personal instruction to recall the importance of relying on qualified spiritual masters and virtuous friends who encourage us and to help us accumulate virtue. On a wider scale, one can rely on Dharma brothers and sisters in our life, like-minded people who help remind us of the Dharma. Having respect for them and relying upon them is meaningful for oneself as a method to protect one's mindfulness, and as a way to guard introspection.

1.2.2.2.2. How to generate the inner condition of correct mental application

Having explained the outer conditions next the method to generate the inner conditions of correct mental application is presented. This next verse serves as a proclamation, or what we should recall.

The verse reads:

31. *Buddhas and bodhisattvas
Are endowed with unobstructed sight of everything.
Say, 'I am always in the field of vision
Of their five eyes.'*
32ab. *By contemplating this, shame,
And likewise respect and fear are attained.*

As explained by Gyaltsab Je in the commentary:

Further, the buddhas and bodhisattvas can see all phenomena without obstruction, regardless of place or time. So one remains at all times clearly in the sight of their five eyes. Considering this generates shame, which takes oneself as the reason, and because one has respect for the teacher and the Dharma and fear of the fruition, one should take care and practise mindfulness.

The first line presents the extent of the buddhas' omniscient mind, and it is because the buddhas have five wisdom eyes that one is always in their presence. Bringing this to mind, along with the qualities of the buddhas' omniscience and the qualities of the bodhisattvas, one should always feel their presence, because they are in constant awareness of our being.

The way to envision shame is that if one recalls that one is always in the presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas then one does not want to show disrespect, so one refrains from engaging in misdeeds. This is how one applies mindfulness and introspection in relation to shame.

As the commentary continues, *because one has respect for the teacher and the Dharma and fear of the fruition, one should take care and practise mindfulness.*

The next point, which is the consideration for others, comes because of the respect one has for the teacher and the Dharma and fear of the results of one's negative consequences (one's misdeeds). By recalling the reason of others, one again applies mindfulness, and it is in this way that one practises mindfulness on a continuous basis. Again, what is being explained is not obscure, it is quite clear. The main thing for one to take to heart as personal instruction is to apply this in our practice.

To summarise the main point: recall that the Buddhas are omniscient. This means that they know all existence completely and entirely; past, present and future. Think, 'I am always in their presence and so I dare not engage in misdeeds, lapse from my commitments etc.' This recollection is how our mindfulness is supported with introspection.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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